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Caribbean Basin

EXPORTER GUIDE ANNUAL

Caribbean Basin Exporter Guide

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Report Highlights:

The Caribbean Basin remains a large and stable market for U.S. suppliers. Despite gloomy economic conditions around the world and sluggish tourist inflows to the region in 2009, demand for quality U.S. products continues strong. In fact, following a record high \$706 million in U.S. consumer-oriented exports to the region in 2008, U.S. exports in this category during the first half of 2009 still managed to increase by 9 percent over the same period a year earlier. While the level of growth will surely be more moderate in the immediate future, the region continues to offer opportunities for U.S. suppliers willing to work in a fragmented and diverse market.

Post:

Miami ATO

Executive Summary:

The Caribbean is an excellent market for U.S. suppliers, due in large part to the fact that demand for imported food products is largely inelastic. With an insufficient amount of arable land, scant water resources in some islands, no economies of scale, and a limited food-processing sector, the islands of the Caribbean must import the majority of their food needs. Moreover, anywhere from 60 to 90 percent (depending on the island) of the Caribbean's tourists are from the United States, which fuels demand for U.S. products in Caribbean food service outlets. Although tourism has slowed in 2009, it continues to be a key factor in generating demand for U.S. products, particularly in the food service sector. The CBATO islands alone are visited by approximately 7 million stop-over tourists annually. There is strong appeal among the 3.7 million local residents for U.S. products as well. This is primarily due to the exposure to U.S. products through visits that many make to the United States and through television channels that are broadcast to the islands by major U.S. networks.

The United States is the largest supplier of food products to the Caribbean Basin. In 2008, the United States exported \$706 million worth of consumer-oriented food products to the Caribbean Basin, a 16 percent increase from the previous year. During the first six months of 2009, U.S. exports of consumer-oriented products to the region increased by 9 percent in comparison to the same period in 2008. Consumer-oriented products account for 55 percent of U.S. agricultural, fish and forestry exports to the Caribbean Basin, with poultry, red meats, snacks, dairy products, and processed fruit & vegetables rounding out the top five export categories. In 2008, the United States also exported \$30 million dollars worth of seafood products to the region.

Competition from Europe, Canada, South and Central America is becoming more intense in the Caribbean. While the United States enjoys several advantages in the region, U.S. suppliers should be mindful that they will have to work hard at capitalizing on opportunities in the Caribbean Basin in the years to come.

Author Defined:

NOTE: For purposes of this report, the Caribbean Basin refers to the Caribbean Basin Agricultural Trade Office's (CBATO) islands of coverage: Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Aruba, The Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Grenada, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles (Curaçao, Bonaire, Sint Maarten, Saba & St. Eustatius), St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, Saint Martin, St. Barthélemy, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Trinidad & Tobago, and Turks & Caicos Islands.

SECTION I. MARKET OVERVIEW

Real GDP for the broad Caribbean region is estimated to have grown by 3.25 percent in 2008, compared to 4.0 percent average annual growth in 2003 to 2007. External factors such as a slowing world economy, turmoil in the global financial system, tight credit markets, and sharp increases in inflation resulting from high fuel and food prices, all took a toll on the region's small economies.

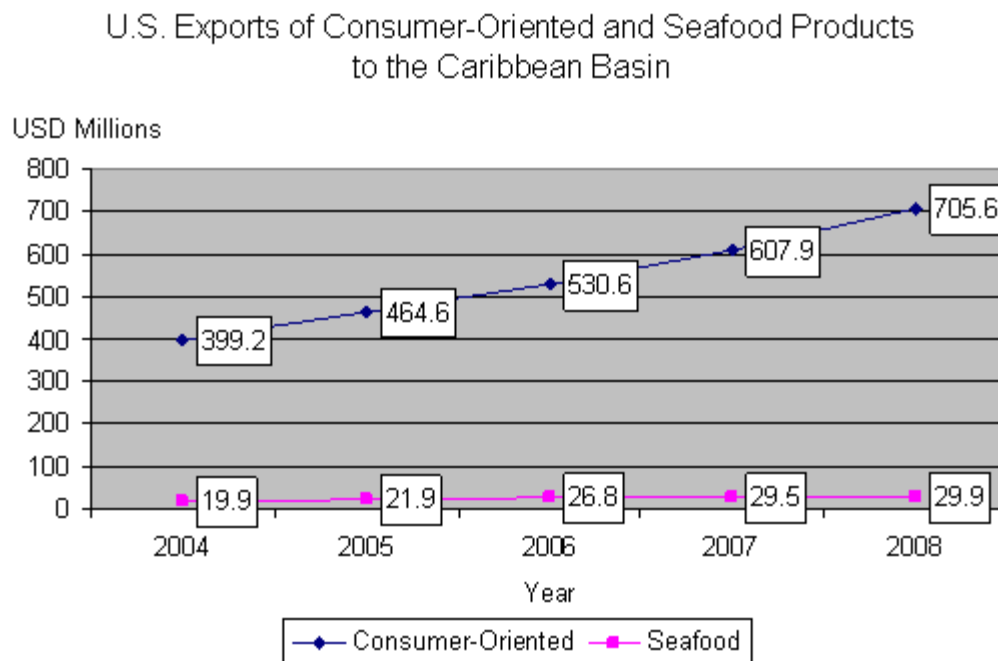
To a large extent, overall economic well being in the Caribbean is intimately linked to the tourism sector. The vast majority of islands in the region rely heavily (some almost exclusively) on tourism as a source of income. In 2007, stop-over tourist arrivals to the Caribbean Basin continued their upward trend reaching 6.9 million, up 8 percent from 2006. However, preliminary information from the World Tourism Organization indicates that international tourist arrivals to the region slowed considerably in 2008, particularly during the latter half of the year. The financial crisis in the United States, the source of over half of the region's tourists, softened tourist demand considerably. Demand from Europe, which accounts for another quarter of the region's tourists, has also weakened as a result of poor economic conditions.

With all of these economic factors still in play, the outlook for Caribbean tourist activity and consequently for the region's overall economic performance in 2009, is one of slowdown. As long as the world economy remains weak and volatile, there will be little relief for the region's economy which is extremely reliant on tourism as a source of revenue and employment.

Nonetheless, the Caribbean remains an excellent market for U.S. suppliers, due in large part to the fact that demand for imported food products is largely inelastic. With an insufficient amount of arable land, scant water resources in some islands, no economies of scale, and a limited food-processing sector, the islands of the Caribbean must import the majority of their food needs. Moreover, anywhere from 60 to 90 percent (depending on the island) of the Caribbean's tourists are from the United States, which fuels demand for U.S. products in Caribbean food service outlets. There is strong appeal among the 3.7 million local residents for U.S. products as well. This is primarily due to the exposure to U.S. products through visits that many make to the United States and through television channels that are broadcast to the islands by major U.S. networks.

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and forestry exports to the Caribbean Basin, with poultry, read meats, snacks, dairy products, and processed fruit & vegetables rounding out the top five export categories. In 2008, the United States also exported \$30 million dollars worth of seafood products to the region.



Source: Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, Foreign Trade Statistics

Caribbean importers have a long history of doing business with the United States. Their strong interest in U.S. suppliers and products is mainly due to the following: close proximity (for countries as far south as the Leeward Windward islands), long-standing reputation of high quality products, and superior quality of service. As a testament to the reputation of U.S. products in the Caribbean, many local importers have noted that they are able to source a variety of products from other countries, but few match the reliability in quality of their U.S. counterparts.

Advantages	Challenges
With little arable land and food production, the islands of the Caribbean must import most of their food needs.	In some markets, such as the French West Indies, a key constraint is breaking the traditional liaisons with Europe. Many Chefs are European trained and thus prefer European products.
Although tourism has slowed in 2009, it continues to be a key factor in generating demand for U.S. products, particularly in the food service sector. The CBATO islands	Overall Caribbean well-being is overly dependent on tourism. Hence, economies remain very susceptible to any world events that may disrupt tourism (i.e. the world

alone are visited by approximately 7 million stop-over tourists annually.	economy, terrorism, more active hurricane seasons, etc.).
The United States is the source of over 50 percent of all tourists visiting the region, boosting demand for U.S. foods.	In some cases there are cheaper transportation rates from Europe than from the United States.
Proximity and ease of shipment works to the advantage of U.S. suppliers.	The escalation of food prices in 2008 exposed the region's dependence on imports to satisfy its food needs. As a result, the political will for attaining regional food security and food sovereignty has strengthened, and the islands are actively attempting to boost domestic production and diversify food supplies.
Exposure to US media as well as language, cultural, and commercial ties with the United States all contribute to consumers having a positive attitude toward U.S. products.	The nature of individual island markets requires special effort from US exporters: dealing with several small accounts; consolidation of small orders; complying with different import requirements for select products; ascertaining different market characteristics in every island.
US exporters, particularly south Florida consolidators, service the market very well and are in many ways better positioned to supply the Caribbean than competitors.	The recently signed trade agreement between CARICOM and the EU should prompt more competition from Europe. CARICOM is also negotiating trade agreements with Canada and several Central American countries.
The United States has a dominant market share in the vast majority of Caribbean islands (estimated at 55 percent overall).	Certain products, particularly meat and poultry, may be restricted in selected markets due to either EU or island-specific restrictions.
For the most part, the regulatory environment is fairly open to all types of U.S. products.	

SECTION II. EXPORTER BUSINESS TIPS

Many of the orders that importers place are small but frequent, so they often do not order full containers from each supplier. Caribbean importers rely heavily on consolidators, particularly those located in South Florida, for shipment of mixed container-loads to their local ports. As a result, a crucial part of doing business with

Caribbean importers is building a relationship with a consolidator in South Florida, and sometimes in New Jersey for purposes of shipping to Bermuda.

Since some resorts and larger supermarkets often order larger shipments directly from suppliers, the main resource for medium to smaller sized retail and food service businesses are local

importer/wholesalers, making them a good target for smaller U.S. exporters. These importer/wholesalers will work with prospective U.S. suppliers to find the best means of product delivery, and meeting local standards and regulations. Local importers will usually stay informed of changing regulations and duties on food and beverage products.

Occasionally, items may be temporarily banned or duties may be increased if it is perceived that imports are competing unfairly with local production, or may pose a phyto or zoosanitary threat. For example, in selected islands, import licenses for chicken leg quarters have been restricted in response to complaints from local processors, and in the Bahamas, citrus fruit from Florida is prohibited due to the citrus canker outbreak. It is always a good idea for U.S. exporters to verify that their product is eligible for entry into a particular island prior to shipping.

Since Caribbean countries have a long standing trade relationship with the United States, most recognize and accept U.S. standards for food and agricultural products. Many countries also follow international standards (e.g. Codex Alimentarius standards) for imports from other countries. U.S. suppliers must be aware that EU standards may apply for some EU territories in the Caribbean. As always, good communication with local importers will help to secure the proper compliance with local food laws.

In most islands, food safety responsibilities fall under the Ministry of Public Health or its equivalent. The Ministry of Agriculture may also play a role with plant and animal products both in terms of public health and in terms of plant and animal health. Meat and poultry, dairy products, seafood, and produce typically require import approval and country of origin certification. For example, phytosanitary certificates from the country of origin must accompany imported fresh produce and plants. Health certificates must accompany live animals and animal products.

The majority of Caribbean countries accept standard U.S. labeling including the standard U.S. nutritional fact panel. However, islands such as Guadeloupe and Martinique require food and beverage labels in French. Enforcement of labeling and other product standards, which usually falls under the jurisdiction of a National Standards Institution, is carried out mostly at the port of entry but routine and random checks at the retail and wholesale levels are also conducted.

For more information on Caribbean Basin regulations and standards, see the following Foreign Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards (FAIRS) Reports: [Aruba - FAIRS Country Report](#), [The Bahamas - FAIRS Country Report](#), [Barbados - FAIRS Country Report](#), [Bermuda - FAIRS Country Report](#), [Netherlands Antilles - FAIRS Country Report](#), [Trinidad & Tobago - FAIRS Country Report](#).

SECTION III. MARKET SECTOR STRUCTURE AND TRENDS

A. HRI Food Service Sector

While the tourism outlook remains somewhat uncertain, the region has seen strong investment in tourism infrastructure in recent years which certainly strengthens the long term potential of the hotel, restaurant, and institutional (HRI) food service sector. Overall, the Caribbean HRI food service sector accounts for 40 to 45 percent of consumer related agricultural imports. The percentage of Caribbean hotels and restaurants that are independently owned varies from approximately 90 percent in Grenada to 25 percent in the Bahamas (Nassau in particular). This characteristic impacts the flow of imports to the island. The independent restaurant or hotel owner is more likely to source their food and beverage products from local wholesalers, while larger chain restaurants and hotels have both the connections and the economies of scale to make direct imports from a U.S. agent their main source.

While corporate-owned resorts and hotels have boomed over recent years, individual-owned food service businesses are still strong on all Caribbean islands. Local individual-owned restaurants remain especially popular in countries such as Aruba and Barbados. Some of the world's most acclaimed chefs are working in the Caribbean. Using high quality ingredients, these chefs and their restaurants often are a valuable platform for U.S. food and beverage products. However, many chefs are European trained and thus breaking their preference toward European products can be challenging.

For more information on the HRI food service sector in the Caribbean Basin, see the 2009 Eastern Caribbean HRI Sector Report [2009 Eastern Caribbean HRI Sector Report](#). Visit www.cbato.fas.usda.gov for additional reports.

B. Retail Sector

About 55 to 60 percent of consumer related agricultural imports in the Caribbean is destined for the retail sector. Most of the products stocked on the shelves of Caribbean retail stores are imported.

As in the HRI sector, smaller retailers such as neighborhood 'mom and pop' stores will buy most if not all of their products from local import wholesalers. These retailers have a slower turnaround on product sales and have limited space for storage, which both lead to wholesale as a preferred option for sourcing food and beverage products.

In contrast, supermarket chains have both local and U.S. or foreign-based purchasing offices. They

work closely with U.S. suppliers to find the best prices for products of interest. Again, a consolidator in South Florida is still crucial to the import of products to these outlets.

International retail chains in the Caribbean include: Carrefour, PriceSmart, and Cost-U-Less. While these retail outlets do quite well, 'mom and pop' stores will continue to supply a large share of consumers' needs for basic supplies. In addition, national and international convenience stores and gas marts play a small but growing role in consumer food purchases as well, contributing about 5-10 percent of total retail food sales.

An interesting market niche in the retail sector is yacht provisioning. Yachters (or 'yachtees' as they are known in some islands) often phone or fax in their orders to harbor stores or may venture into town to visit the local supermarkets who cater to their specific needs. This is especially prevalent in the British Virgin Islands, Antigua and Barbuda, and in Trinidad and Tobago.

The relatively weak U.S. dollar is another factor working in favor of U.S. exports to the region. Caribbean importers are favoring U.S. food and beverage products over EU products. This is especially true in Caribbean countries with currency pegged to the U.S. dollar.

For more information on the retail food sector in the Caribbean Basin, see the [2008 Dutch Caribbean Retail Sector Report](#). Visit www.cbato.fas.usda.gov for additional reports.

C. Food Processing Sector

Caribbean food processors mainly consist of wheat flour mills, rice and pasta products, bakery products, and soybean products. Food processing in the Caribbean is quite limited and highly concentrated in the larger countries such as the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. In the CBATO's islands of coverage, the islands of Trinidad and Barbados offer opportunities for U.S. suppliers of food and beverage ingredients. Several factors are currently driving the growth of the food processing sector in these two islands. These include the relatively high standards of living and education, increased exposure to other regions of the world through travel and the Internet, rising number of women in the workforce, the pursuit for a healthier society, and an increase in foreign direct investment (FDI). Food processors within the region buy roughly 20 percent of raw materials and food ingredients from local suppliers and import 80 percent from international suppliers.

For more information on the food processing sector in the Caribbean Basin, see the [2006 Eastern Caribbean Food Processing Ingredients Sector Report](#).

SECTION IV. BEST CONSUMER ORIENTED PRODUCT PROSPECTS

Market Opportunities exist for practically all high-value, consumer-oriented foods/beverages and seafood products in the Caribbean Basin. Some of the most prominent growth categories include:

Product Category	2008 Market Size* (Volume)	2008 Imports* (\$1,000)	5-Yr. Avg. Annual Import Growth*	Import Tariff Rate**	Key Constraints Over Market Development	Market Attractiveness for USA
Snack Foods	Min. Local Production	67,558	15.4%	0-20%	The retail market is still a niche market, subject to the health of the economy. The HRI mkt. depends on tourism.	As with most consumer-oriented products, demand should continue strong, albeit tempered by overall economic conditions.
Red Meats, fresh, chilled & frozen	Min. Local Production	82,103	16.5%	0-40%	The retail market is still a niche market, subject to the health of the economy. The HRI mkt. depends on tourism.	As with most consumer-oriented products, demand should continue strong, albeit tempered by overall economic conditions.
Poultry Meat	Min. Local Production	111,301	15.1%	0-40% in most islands	Some domestic production in select islands (i.e. Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados). The retail mkt. is subject to the health of the economy. The HRI mkt. depends on tourism.	As with most consumer-oriented products, demand should continue strong, albeit tempered by overall economic conditions.
Dairy Products	Min. Local Production	72,564	22.5%	0-20%	The retail market is still a niche market, subject to the health of the economy. The HRI mkt. depends on tourism.	Attractive to U.S. suppliers with market driven approach to business in the Caribbean.
Fresh Fruit	Min. Local Production	34,214	13.2%	0-20%	The retail market is still a niche market, subject to the health of the economy. The HRI mkt. depends on tourism.	As with most consumer-oriented products, demand should continue strong, albeit tempered by overall economic conditions.
Fruit & Vegetable Juices	Min. Local Production	34,731	8.6%	0-20%	Some domestic production in select islands (i.e. Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados). The retail mkt. is subject to the health of the economy. The HRI mkt. depends on tourism.	As with most consumer-oriented products, demand should continue strong, albeit tempered by overall economic conditions.

*Total market size data is unavailable. Imports and average annual import growth is based on U.S. export data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census trade data.

**Import duties and competing imports vary from country to country in the Caribbean.

SECTION V. KEY CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

A. For more information, please contact:

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B. Useful U.S. Government Websites:

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), USDA

This site provides extensive information on FAS programs and services, trade statistics, market research, trade shows and events, and much more.

<http://www.fas.usda.gov>

Caribbean Basin Agricultural Trade Office (CBATO), FAS/USDA

The CBATO website offers information on services available to U.S. exporters in the Caribbean, promotional activities, market research and more.

<http://www.cbato.fas.usda.gov>

US Department of Commerce

This is the U.S. Government's Export Portal, which provides a wealth of information on services and programs available to U.S. exporters. Comprehensive Country Commercial Guides are available for select markets by clicking on the *Market Research* link and then selecting the *Market Research Library* link.

<http://www.export.gov>

US Department of State

This site provides valuable information on travel & business in foreign countries, information on U.S. Embassies and Consulates around the world (www.usembassy.gov), and country background notes.

<http://www.state.gov>

Central Intelligence Agency

The CIA's on-line World Factbook provides useful and up-to-date guides for practically every country in the world.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

C. Other Useful Sources of Information (Non-U.S. Government):

The websites listed below are provided for the readers' convenience; USDA does **NOT** in any way endorse, guarantee the accuracy of, or necessarily concur with the information contained in these websites.

CARICOM (Caribbean Community)

<http://www.caricom.org>

Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association (CHTA)

<http://www.caribbeanhotelassociation.com>

Caribbean Tourism Organization

<http://www.onecaribbean.org>

APPENDIX I. STATISTICS

The following statistics were obtained from several sources. Many sources of statistical information were consulted due to the widespread nature of the Caribbean Basin Agricultural Trade Office's islands of coverage. Some variations, depending on the agency compiling data, will exist in the tables provided.

TABLE A. KEY CARIBBEAN BASIN TRADE & DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Agricultural Imports From All Countries (\$Mil) / U.S. Market Share (%) ^{1/}	2,122/57%
Consumer Food Imports From All Countries (\$Mil) / U.S. Market Share (%) ^{1/}	1,295/58%
Edible Fishery Imports From All Countries (\$Mil) / U.S. Market Share (%) ^{1/}	90.4/38%
Total Population (Millions) / Annual Growth Rate (%) ^{2/}	3.8 /Range: - 0.3 to 2.5%
Urban Population (Millions) / Annual Growth Rate (%)	2.0/Range:0.1 to 2.9%
Number of Major Metropolitan Areas ^{3/}	0
Size of the Middle Class (Millions) / Growth Rate (%)	N/A
Per Capita Gross Domestic Product (ppp, U.S. Dollars)	Range: \$3,400 to \$69,900
Unemployment Rate (%)	Range: 2.2 to 23.2 %
Per Capita Food Expenditures (U.S. Dollars)	N/A
Percent of Female Population Employed ^{4/}	Range: 37 to 71%
Exchange Rate (US\$1 = Caribbean country's currency)	Varies by Country

Footnotes

1/ 2007 estimate based on available Global Trade Atlas data for Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago.

2009 estimate.

3/ Populations in excess of 1,000,000

4/ Percent of working age (15-64) female population.

Source: CIA World Factbook, Global Trade Atlas, and Euromonitor.

TABLE B. CONSUMER FOOD AND EDIBLE FISHERY PRODUCT IMPORTS

In Thousands of Dollars.

	2006	2007	2008
Consumer-Oriented Ag. TOTAL	530,571	607,867	705,641
Snack Foods	49,227	55,285	67,558
Breakfast Cereals	10,549	11,838	15,964
Red Meat, Fr/Ch/Fr	66,001	64,410	82,103
Red Meats, Prep/Pres	10,803	11,550	11,381
Poultry Meat	67,416	86,823	111,301
Dairy Products	41,849	53,036	72,564
Eggs & Products	9,637	13,700	16,466
Fresh Fruit	25,374	31,820	34,214
Fresh Vegetables	36,653	23,376	23,376
Processed Fruit & Veg	25,416	41,570	42,987
Fruit & Veg Juices	31,905	33,097	34,731
Tree Nuts	5,526	6,147	6,471
Wine & Beer	32,714	35,820	34,748
Nursery Products	19,194	18,865	12,395
Pet Foods	16,474	20,858	23,755
Other Consumer-Oriented	81,783	99,672	115,629
Seafood Products	26,786	29,544	29,913
Salmon Whole/Evis	720	615	934
Salmon Canned	814	1,040	1,256
Crab & Meat	876	679	1,088
Surimi (Fish Paste)	210	18	0
Roe/Urchin/Fish Eggs	257	660	746
Other Seafood	23,909	26,532	25,889
Agricultural Products TOTAL	727,562	844,404	1,048,673
AG, FISH & FORESTRY TOTAL	954,067	1,065,239	1,281,871

Note: Trade data for approximately half of the Caribbean Basin countries are unavailable from the UN Trade database and other private databases either because the reporting countries have not reported the data or simply because the data does not exist. Therefore, the above table is based on U.S. export data only. Overall U.S. market share is estimated at 55 percent, ranging from single digits in the French Antilles to as much as 95 percent in The Bahamas.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census Trade Data.

TABLE C. TOP 15 SUPPLIERS OF CONSUMER FOODS & EDIBLE FISHERY PRODUCTS

Consumer-Oriented Agricultural Imports*, US\$

	2005	2006	2007
World	1,084,801,659	1,143,825,952	1,294,630,061
United States	628,202,194	657,719,228	750,184,004
Trinidad & Tobago	56,237,065	59,394,110	65,482,491
Canada	46,492,479	47,987,021	53,791,395
New Zealand	39,293,721	35,373,221	50,194,936
United Kingdom	43,487,526	43,608,512	41,698,167
Netherlands	25,987,218	29,767,750	28,270,627
Brazil	21,340,178	19,602,025	26,077,271
Ireland	16,681,598	19,468,758	24,708,610
France	17,671,791	18,381,596	19,433,788
Jamaica	21,386,898	20,190,381	18,763,606
Costa Rica	11,027,757	13,416,479	16,079,535
Argentina	12,075,002	14,201,016	15,716,633
China	7,528,656	10,276,617	10,419,694
Australia	8,460,902	10,872,765	9,209,826
Uruguay	8,945,095	9,637,327	9,028,545

Fish & Seafood Product Imports*, US\$

	2005	2006	2007
World	76,758,786	81,255,887	90,398,171
United States	28,001,469	34,476,003	34,492,943
Canada	15,250,558	18,245,089	19,538,106
Thailand	5,499,294	4,717,816	6,501,936
Guyana	4,523,139	5,201,395	6,020,155
Norway	3,250,395	3,730,566	3,846,329
Panama	611,602	1,182,197	2,333,006
Chile	1,314,942	1,077,116	1,638,961
Suriname	746,717	636,683	1,077,096
Belize	226,493	457,100	786,704
St. Vincent & The Grenadines	4,278,136	1,320,479	640,699
China	731,954	340,912	596,348
Peru	551,502	571,020	515,985
Costa Rica	393,199	328,869	435,548
Vietnam	368,299	458,534	206,413
Ecuador	388,611	315,029	192,999

* Import data for all Caribbean Basin countries is not available. Data in the above tables are for Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago.

Source: Global Trade Atlas.